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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/23): BRIEF TRUCE IN GAZA

Main Stories:

All papers lead with news of an Egyptian-brokered agreement renewing the truce between Israel and Palestinian factions in Gaza for a period of 24 hours. However, reports of Palestinian projectiles launched at the Israeli Kissufim Military base in the southern Gaza Strip, as well as Israeli airstrikes on Palestinian targets east of Gaza City, cast early doubts on whether the truce would hold. Al Hayat Al Jadeeda adds that Israeli FM Livni will visit Egypt on Thursday to discuss extending the truce in Gaza.

All papers note that Hamas' Gaza leader Haniyeh urged Turkey to intervene in order to prevent an Israeli offensive. This followed reports speculating that Israel plans to carry out a gradual offensive and to assassinate militant leaders, in response to which the different factions in Gaza threatened to carry out retaliatory suicide operations inside Israel. Al Quds runs a statement by the French Foreign Minister Kouchner expressing concerns over the escalation in Gaza.

All papers discuss the mounting food crisis in Gaza after bakeries ran out of flour. Al Ayyam carries a front page photo of Palestinians waiting in a long queue to buy bread. The papers also report on statements by the PA Minister of Information Riyad Malki emphasizing the need for calm in Gaza and criticizing Israel for stopping the transfer of allowances to support the poor in Gaza and for preventing the entry of Egyptian humanitarian assistance for a third consecutive day.

All papers report on PA President Abbas' visit to Russia where he received support from Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and President Medvedev "as the legitimate president of the Palestinian people." Lavrov criticized Hamas' "provocations" and its boycott of the

Palestinian internal dialogue.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam, citing an AFP report, report on statements by Secretary of State Rice acknowledging that while the Bush administration's popularity is "not very great" in the Arab world, with time the U.S. support for freedom in the Middle East will be "respected" by the people of the region. Rice added that all people in the region should live free of oppression. She also acknowledged, according to the papers, that it may not be clear to those in the region how the US can defend Israel's right to exist and at the same time defend the Palestinians' right to statehood and independence.

Al Quds quotes a recent World Bank report that concludes trade in the West Bank cannot improve under the current Israeli restrictions and checkpoint regime. The report focused on the Allenby border crossing between the West Bank and Jordan where Palestinian exports must pass through several Israeli obstacles. It demands the lifting of existing Israeli limitations on the travel of Palestinian citizens and goods. The report also considers Gaza to be on the verge of economic collapse due to the Israeli siege.

All papers report that the hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners in Ofer prison continues. The reports state that prison guards stormed one of the prison blocs with dogs and forced some of the prisoners into another cell bloc. The papers report that the guards insulted and threatened the prisoners.

Al Ayyam runs a front page report on statements by the Israeli B'Tselem human rights organization demanding that the Israeli Ofra settlement, which it claims is built on private Palestinian

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property, be dismantled and the land returned to its rightful Palestinian owners. The organization claims that it based its findings on official Israeli land registration documents issued by the Israeli Civil Administration.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadeeda report on a visit by the British Minister of State for the Middle East Bill Rammell and the British Consul General Richard Makepeace to Hebron Monday. At the end of the tour, Rammell demanded the removal of illegal Israeli settlements and added that he personally witnessed the abuses of the Israeli settlers against the Palestinian citizens in Hebron.

All the papers carry front page news of the scheduled visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Bethlehem on May 12th as part of his visit to the region starting on May 8th 2009.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1. Mohamad Al Mubarak opines in Al Quds under the title "Will Rumsfeld escape or disappear?": "It is regrettable that the courts have so far not considered the war crimes committed by Rumsfeld, which led to the killing and displacement of millions of innocents and violated international laws and norms. The American judiciary has opted to look into cases of Rumsfeld's involvement in torture orders in the prisons of the US Department of Defense, and to consider whether this was in violation of U.S. law...One of the most important lessons learned from this historical event, is that as Arabs and Muslims, we should not deal with other states, including the United States, without regard to international law. Further, Arab countries shouldn't get involved with the United States in all that it asks them to do, as that might have unpredictable ramifications...For instance, amongst the "courtesies" committed by Arab nations for the United States is their support for the Israeli siege of Gaza, which is in violation of all international laws and norms, and which may ultimately have legal implications."

2. Hani Al Masri editorializes in Al Ayyam under the title "The fate of the truce: Total collapse or controlled escalation?": "It is no coincidence that the Road Map is implemented solely by the Palestinian side in light of its own internal division. If this division continues, it will be no surprise if Israel is able to enforce a similar Israeli road map in Gaza. The internal division

has thereby weakened all the Palestinians, and made them vulnerable to Israeli blackmail, and placed them in competition with one another to see which side - Gaza or the West Bank - is the first to reach an incomplete security solution."

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